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ABSTRACT

This study of the effects of an assistant principal's role limitations on problem-solving strategies focuses on three research areas: the sources of problematic situations; problem-solving strategies used and the reasons for their selection; and the consequences of those actions on the school. Participant observation and interviews constitute the primary methodologies in this study of one female high school assistant principal. Building on the theories of Bensman and Lilienfield, of Hanson, and of Goffman, a model is constructed of the problem-solving process. The stages include: (1) recognition of the problem situation and identification of its sources; (2) definition of the situation within the individual locus of control; (3) choice of a performance style congruent with role authority; and (4) consequences for the school. The goal of all performance styles is to maintain school stability. Findings indicate that performance styles are determined by individual role authority. Most administrators choose performance styles consistent with predictable roles, which are the most effective in maintaining school stability. (25 references) (LMI)

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PERFORMANCE STYLES AND THE HIGH SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: A FIELD STUDY

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Introduction

Organizational roles, may be defined as "the patterns in which we believe we are expected (by others) to behave" (Larwood, 1984). These patterns of behavior are frequently governed by official job roles which give us authority to act or perform in certain ways. This is true of the role of the high school assistant principal. Not only must the assistant principal solve problems in relation to his or her "official role", a high school assistant principal must also serve as intermediary or "middle-man" in resolving problems involving the high school principal and staff members. Private roles, such as that of parent, may cause the assistant principal to resolve issues in yet another manner.

A 1973 study by Reed describes the activity of a high school as a "turbulent field". There is a busyness and unexpected quality to this turbulent field or high school environment to the extent that problematic situations arise daily and must be resolved.

Purpose

This study examines how the high school assistant principal resolves various problematic situations in light of her official and unofficial job

roles and the constraints imposed by the specific authority and limitations inherent in these roles.

The research is guided by three questions: (1) What are the sources of the problematic situations? (2) What strategies does the high school assistant principal use to resolve these problematic situations and why are these strategies selected? (3) What are the consequences or effects of the resolution of problematic situations on the culture of the high school?

Research Design

A female high school assistant principal was selected for this study. Selection criteria included: (1) proximity to the university for ease of multiple observations; (2) three to five years experience as an assistant principal; (3) recommendation from district office for participation; (4) serve as an assistant principal in a moderate-sized high school (enrollment of 450 to 1500 students); (5) hold a full-time position as a high school assistant principal

Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used to address the major research questions. Data were collected over a six week period and included five participant observations of a high school assistant principal

at her work site. Three interviews were conducted using prepared interview guides. Research methods also included document analysis (letters, memos, school bulletins), an examination of the physical environment, photo-graphs, and a limited number of student surveys.

Similar to the participant-observer role used in many qualitative studies, the researcher's presence during observation was known to all. The assistant principal made a point of introducing the investigator to teachers, support staff, students, and administrative staff throughout the data collection period. The researcher was allowed to be present and was permitted to observe nearly all interactions. Only twice was the researcher asked to leave during particularly "sensitive conferences." After these particular sessions, the assistant principal shared the nature and purpose of the private sessions with the observer.

While observing the assistant principal, data collection consisted of recording all activities and interactions chronologically using field notes. These notes were summarized at the close of each observation session. A tape recorder was used for each interview session with the assistant principal but was not used to record conversations with students or staff. Each taped session was transcribed.

The investigator's presence was accepted comfortably by the secretar-

ies, generally ignored by the high school principal, and "taken for granted" by students and staff.

Narrative

Joyce Andrew, the subject of this study, is the assistant high school principal at Edison High School in the community of Lanham. Edison is a three year comprehensive high school serving approximately 580 students of primarily Caucasian descent. The only minority students are children of professors who teach at the local university or children who have been adopted by citizens of the Lanham community.

The red brick, three story high school sits atop a small hill only three blocks from the downtown center of the community. The building is not imposing but solid in appearance. Exterior windows show evidence of remodeling and energy conservation measures.

Landscaping in front of the high school is functional - not aesthetic. Lawns are mowed but not manicured. There are no shrubs or trees to soften the brick ediface. Visitors are obliged to follow instructions posted on all exterior doors - report to the main office. "Edison High School" is emblazoned above the main doorway in two foot high letters. Upon entering the building one must climb an additional eight to ten steps to the second floor. The Edison High School mascot, a bear, carved from a

dark wood, sits atop the stairs to the right.

The secretary slides open the window, inquires as to the visitor's business, and asks the visitor to enter the main office. There is no place to sit. One must stand with one's back to two large file cabinets so as not to inhibit the progress of individuals to and from offices. There are five doors in a semi-circle - all face the secretary area. Two secretaries occupy the cramped office area. The day is warm - a large box fan whirs noisily outside the assistant principal's office.

Barely three to four minutes pass and the assistant principal comes out of the registrar's office to greet the visitor. Joyce Andrew is a small woman - five feet two inches. Her movements are quick. She is slender, friendly, but businesslike. She invites the visitor into her office - a small area with a desk facing one wall, computer on another wall and three "visitor chairs" in a small semi-circle. A large window adjacent to Andrew's desk overlooks the playfield in front of the school.

Joyce Andrew leans forward in her chair. She shares that she has been an assistant principal at Edison High School for the past five years. She and the current principal, J.D. Smith, came to Edison together. They followed an administration weak in enforcing student behavioral expectations. Goals for the first two to three years for the current adminis-

tration entailed revising discipline policies, establishing consistency and follow-through for consequences.

Mrs. Andrew is the mother of four children, two of whom attend Edison High School. She shares that while she enjoys having her children at work with her, there are some difficulties which "crop up" from time to time. The principal is out of the office. Mrs. Andrew states that this is a fairly common occurrence and that she must frequently "take charge" of the school in his absence. Sometimes this presents problems for her in that she does not have full authority in some areas to resolve issues.

The Assistant Principal comments that her job responsibilities include: student discipline, student government, multi-disciplinary team representation, supervision of a few staff members, and supervision of the cafeteria at lunch time.

The class bell rings for second period. Mrs. Andrew invites the visitor to accompany her as she "sweeps" the halls for tardy students. The "tour of duty" leads upstairs to a brown carpeted hallway with gray lockers lining either side of the hallway. A few students are in the hall but quickly disappear into classrooms when the Assistant Principal approaches. Others call out a "good morning" and walk briskly to their destination. The next stop is the library where Mrs. Andrew looks quickly

right and left to determine whether there are any truant students hiding out. Finding none, she wishes the librarians a "good day" and proceeds downstairs to the basement area. A large group of students stand in the hallway outside room B-20. The bell has rung and the students should have been in class. The Assistant Principal wonders where their teacher might be. The chemistry teacher suddenly appears, unlocks the door, and explains that he was in the process of gathering laboratory materials. Mrs. Andrew exhanges small talk with him, smiles at the students, and then proceeds to the cafeteria. She chats with the cooks, has a glass of juice and two peanut butter cookies, explaining that she expends a considerable amount of energy in her job.

The Assistant Principal shares that she dislikes supervising the cafeteria at noon. The cafeteria is quite small, broken by columns and long rectangular tables. Probably only 100 to 150 of the 580 students can be seated at one time. Students are permitted to leave campus during the lunch time. Many go downtown for lunch. Others eat in classrooms, go outside, or sit on the floor in the hallways to eat. Mrs. Andrew feels "cafeteria duty" a waste of her time but says it "comes with the territory" of being an Assistant High School Principal.

On the way from the cafeteria Mrs. Andrew encounters a special

education teacher who engages her in a long conversation regarding appropriate placement for a student. The Assistant Principal then asks the observer to accompany her to the gymnasium where she must meet with the physical education teacher. The gym has a brick interior with highly waxed hardwood floors. Approximately 20 students work out in a small weightroom off to the right. Two gentlemen sit on a bench in the gymnasium, several hundred feet from the classroom.

Mrs. Andrew approaches the two men. One stands and walks towards her. The other remains seated. The Assistant Principal addresses Mr. Harvey, the physical education teacher. She tells him she needs help in working with Tom, a student in his class, who has reported continuous harassment by one of the bullies of the school during Physical Education classes. After considerable cajoling Mr. Harvey reluctantly agrees to meet with the Assistant Principal and the student in an attempt to resolve the issue.

Upon leaving the gymnasium Mrs. Andrew explains that Mr. Harvey is also the head football coach and the other gentleman sitting on the bench was an assistant football coach. She explains that the class in the weight room is Mr. Harvey's class and that he is not following through on his responsibilities as a teacher by talking football when he should be in the

weight room monitoring students. Mrs. Andrew notes that she will report what she has observed to the principal but will not take formal action with Mr. Harvey as that is "J.D.'s bailiwick".

Throughout the course of field observations the Assistant Principal is observed working with the Student Council, conferencing with several students concerning truancies and other discipline matters, meeting with the high school counselor, athletic director, and substitute teachers. She is also observed resolving Open House concerns, planning Homecoming activities with student leaders, conferencing with the high school principal, talking informally with secretaries, and working with the principal to resolve parent problems.

Edison High School is a very busy place. Mrs. Andrew remarks that some days she needs "roller skates" to manage her responsibilities. The Assistant Principal also remarks that "the issues never end, they just keep coming at you." And, indeed, they did. During observations and throughout the period of data collection, the researcher observed the high school assistant principal in continuous sessions of negotiation, planning, mediating and directing.

Analytic Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws from the works of Bensman and Lilienfeld (1979), Hanson (1985) and Goffman (1959). Hanson (1985) describes a problem solving cycle used by administrators at Elmwood High School which classifies problematic situations as either internal or external. Hanson identifies the basic stages in the problem solving process as: (1) problem recognition stage, (2) problem screening stage, (3) problem distribution stage, (4) decisionmaking stage etc. Of interest in this study are the problem recognition, problem screening, and decisionmaking stages.

According to Hanson, a problematic situation emerges as a growing tension somewhere in the internal or external environment of the school. A problematic situation may be defined as any event or problem which might interrupt the flow of the school or violate the norms or rules of the school e.g., discipline problems, angry parents, misunderstandings between staff members etc. In the problem-recognition stage, the environment is identified as turbulent, or potentially so. There is an attempt to identify the source of the problematic situation. In general, sources of problematic situations in schools arise from those within the system: teachers, students, adminis' ators and those outside the system:

parents and community members.

The problem screening stage noted by Hanson might be described as a "filtering" process prior to decisionmaking or disposition of the problematic situation. Hanson says that an individual will determine whether or not to resolve a problem or issue based on the degree of control he or she believes they may have.

Bensman and Lilienfield (1979) concur with Hanson. Bensman and Lilienfield believe that our defined roles determine the degree of control or jurisdiction we may exercise in resolving a problematic situation:

> Given the different nature of these kinds of roles in modern society, each individual in his life history retains and must respond to two continuously different types of role situations: (1) those expressing his intimate personal self, and (2) those expressing particular public, social, segmented selves. (p.18)

Bensman and Lilienfield also believe that those who achieve or are ascribed to "higher" class or occupational roles will find a greater percentage of their total behavior defined by public roles:

> This is only to say that they occupy positions for which the role demands are highly formalized, specialized, and segmented. They deal with clients from whom they are separated by the

> specialization and hierarchy of their office. (p. 19)

The authors believe that an individual is always forced in situations to manage his or her self-projection so that his behavior in each position is appropriate to that position. "He is constrained not to violate the *situs* of the position he is acting in at the moment. He has to know when the various roles he occupies overlap; that is, if in a nonofficial role he produces behavior that violates the standards of his official roles, he has to judge when the feedback from such behavior will endanger his business role." (p.49)

In the decisionmaking stage, then, of Hanson's process the individual must take into account his or her job role and the constraints or limitations placed on that role by virture of job description and locus of control. Once an individual is aware of his or her latitude and limitations inherent in his official and unofficial roles, the individual may then select a strategy for resolution of the problematic situation. The strategy must be in keeping with the role and according to Goffman (1959), may then be played out as a "performance". Bowman and Ball (1961) define performance as "an actor's execution of his role". (p. 254) Goffman extends the definition in saying, "A performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influ-

ence in any way any of the other participants." (p.8) Goffman also believes that our roles in society necessitate different performances at different times: "We can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience." (p. 9)

Analysis

The theoretical framework provided by the work of Hanson, Bensman and Lilienfield, and Goffman provide a basis for analysis of responses to the research questions: (1) What are the sources of the problematic situations? (2) What strategies does the high school assistant princpal use to resolve these problematic situations and why are these strategies selected? And (3) What are the consequences or effects of the resolution of problematic situations on the culture of the school?

The major sources of problematic situations encountered by the assistant principal arise from groups inside and outside the school. Sources can be people or events. Most sources of problematic situations for Joyce Andrew were people. These included students, teachers, and the principal from inside the organization and parents and community members from outside. (See Figure 1.1 on the following page).

These problematic situations consist of student discipline problems,

staff concerns regarding the principal, student government problems, parental concern over student placement in special education programs, issues raised by the orchestra teacher, counselor concerns about Open House and the principal's interference in the business of the Assistant Principal.

Figure 1.2 (next page) is a schematic which outlines a process for resolution of problematic situations through a variety of performance styles selected by Joyce Andrew, the Assistant High School Principal.

Figure 1.1
Sources of Problematic Situations for the
Assistant Principal at Edison High School

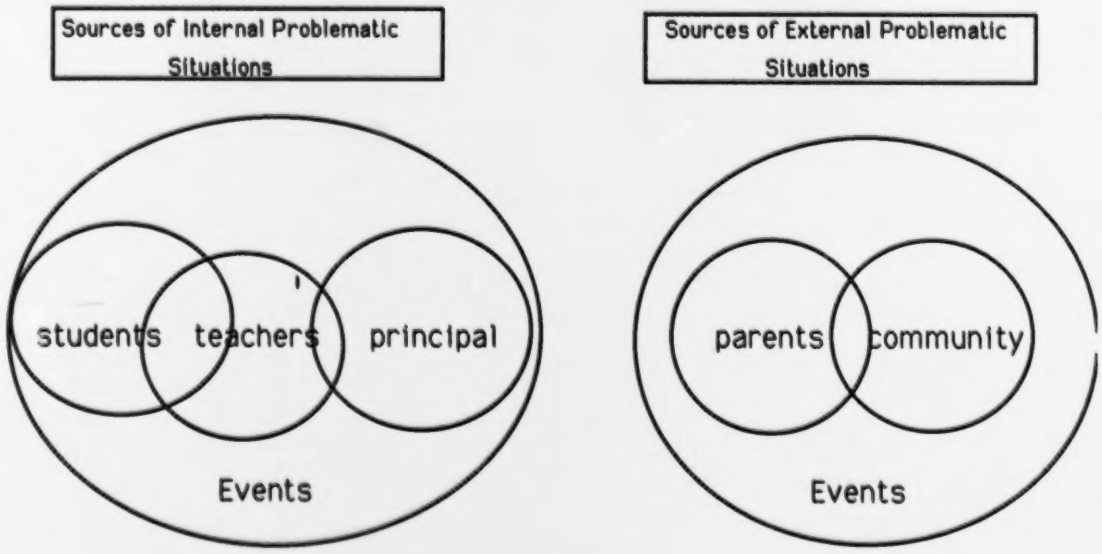
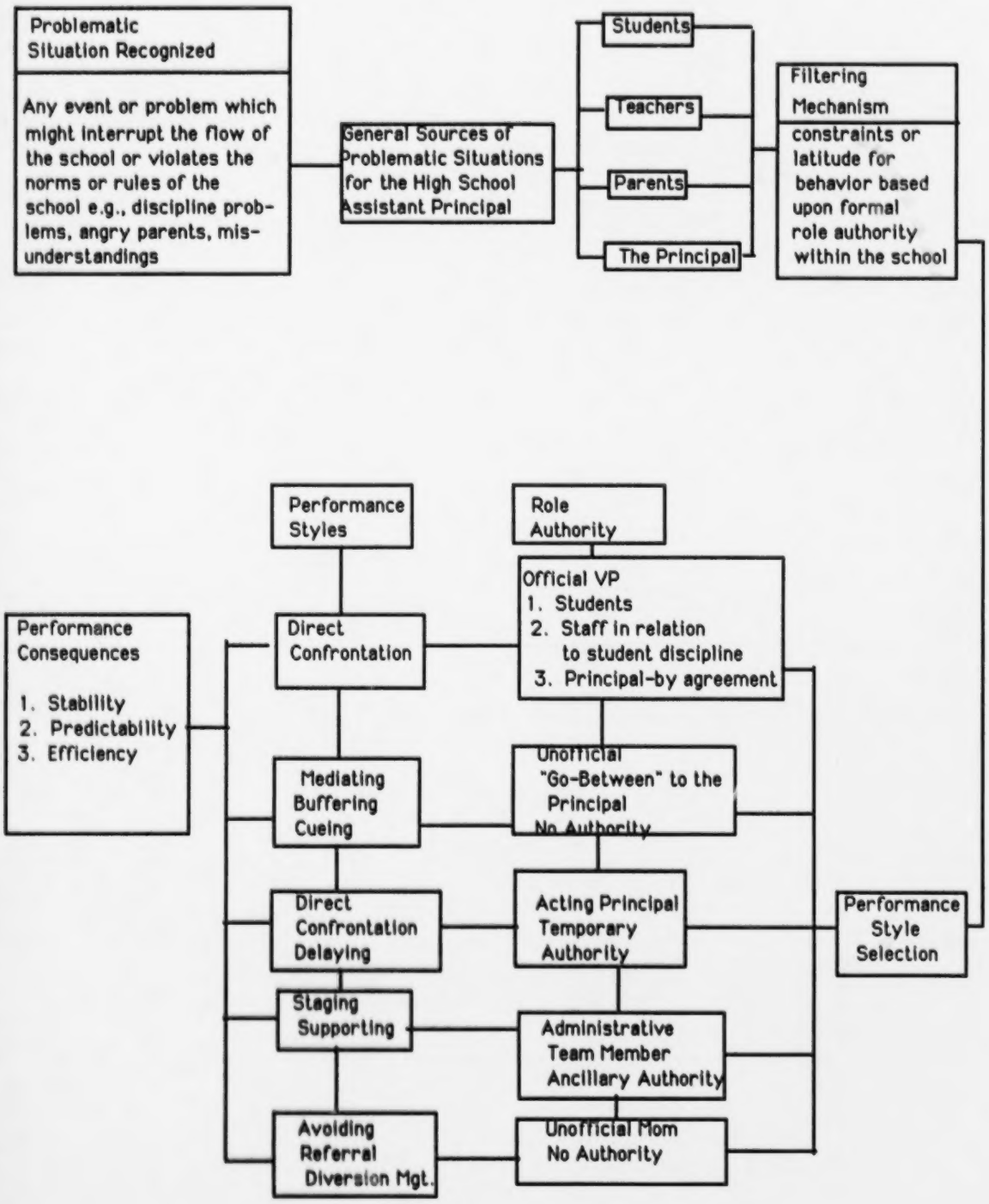


Figure 1.2
Performance Styles of the
High School Assistant Principal


Problematic Situation Recognized
Any event or problem which might interrupt the flow of the school or violates the norms or rules of the school e.g., discipline problems, angry parents, misunderstandings
General Sources of Problematic Situations for the High School Assistant Principal
Students
Teachers
Parents
The Principal
Filtering Mechanism
constraints or latitude for behavior based upon formal role authority within the school
Performance Styles
Role Authority
Official VP
1. Students
2. Staff in relation to student discipline
3. Principal-by agreement
Performance Consequences
1. Stability
2. Predictability
3. Efficiency
Direct Confrontation
Mediating Buffering Cueing
Unofficial "Go-Between" to the Principal No Authority
Direct Confrontation Delaying
Acting Principal Temporary Authority
Performance Style Selection
Staging Supporting
Administrative Team Member Ancillary Authority
Avoiding Referral Diversion Mgt.
Unofficial Mom No Authority

The Filtering Mechanism

Once the source of the problematic situation is identified the Assistant Principal filters the situation in light of the constraints or latitude for behavior based upon her formal role authority within the school. Mrs. Andrew quickly identifies the multiple roles (official and unofficial) she occupies from time to time. The source of the problematic situation helps identify the Assistant Principal's jurisdiction or "locus of control". For example, in the "Official Vice-Principal" role Mrs. Andrew has direct control and authority over students, no authority over teachers except in situations involving student discipline, and control with the principal only by virtue of the agreement and procedures he has established.

As the "Unofficial Go-Between "to the principal, The Assistant Principal has virtually no authority and can only advise. When serving as "Acting Principal" in the absence of the principal Mrs. Andrew has temporary authority over teachers, students, and parents. She may make tentative decisions in the principal's absence but these decisions may be overturned once the principal returns.

As "Administrative Team Member" the Assistant Principal maintains only ancillary or subordinate authority over individuals inside and outside the school community. In the unofficial role of "mom" Mrs. Andrew has

virtually no authority in the school yet she must play the role of "mom" from time to time because her sons attend Edison High School.

Sarason (1971) provides further support for the multiple role theory, "school personnnel are acutely aware that they are part of a very complex arrangement of roles and functions, purposes and traditions, that are not entirely comprehensible either as a whole or in part.....the important point is not that everyone has a conception of the system, but that this conception governs role performance even though it may be a correct or faulty perception."

Mrs. Andrew, then, filters problems through her multiple roles and asks, "how does this situation affect me? in what role? This filtering process is a very important step. The Assistant Principal reacts to problematic situations in many different ways - primarily dependent on her view of the problem's primary effect on her and whichever role she occupies at the time. Encounters with the principal are handled differently than encounters with parents, staff and students. Encounters involving Mrs. Andrew's unofficial role as mother are managed in yet another style.

When the time arrives, then, to select a strategy for responding to the problematic situation, the performance style selection unit serves

as an accumulated experience "file" to which all problem definitions are referred and it serves as a selector mechanism for weighting and evaluating alternative solutions, and for initiating behavior in the direction of the alternative selected.

In nearly every case Mrs. Andrew is not permitted to select a strategy or performance style based on her own personal wishes and desires. She cannot take action independently, because she is a member of an organization and according to Thayer (1986), "the price of membership in a culture or subculture is the abdication of certain degrees of freedom by the individual." Thayer says that to "gain full membership we have to abdicate certain uniquely individual possibilities for experiencing and interpreting our worlds to accomodate normative reality."

In order, then, for Mrs. Andrew to remain a part of her referent groups she must measure her behavior in relation to that which is considered acceptable by the members of each group. In interactions with her principal Mrs. Andrew has some performance styles available within the norms of that relationship. In functioning as an intermediary between the principal and his staff Mrs. Andrew is confined to a different set of performance styles which will maintain the norms of her relationship as part of the administrative team and which accentuate her status as

"second in command".

Of all problem solving performance styles, those involving Mrs. Andrew's role as intermediary between the principal and his staff are among the most sensitive. As part of this analysis it is important, then, to look at each performance style in light of the multiplicity of roles and role expectations demanded of the assistant principal.

The Role of "Official Assistant Principal"

In the "official role" as Assistant Principal Mrs. Andrew's job role and her authority over others is well defined. As Assistant Principal Mrs. Andrew has direct control over students as advisor to the student government and as school disciplinarian. She has virtually no authority over teachers. Authority in matters dealing with parents is limited to disciplinary matters and to special education placement of students. Mrs. Andrew was given permission by her building principal at the beginning of her tenure at Edison to "let him know when she was upset with him".

In matters where the Assistant Principal has full authority over the individuals involved in the problematic situation, Mrs. Andrew most often uses a performance style of direct confrontation to resolve the issue. Examples of direct confrontation can be found in her disciplinary

conferences with students. Conferences include a brief rendition of the nature of the violation, consequences, and occasional clarification. There is no disagreement. The Assistant Principal is clearly in charge. A student leaves and another comes into the office for the same procedure. These exchanges are commonplace. Mrs. Andrew even remarks on one occasion that she had to find "different ways of stating the rules so she does not appear to be disinterested.

Teacher contacts are limited in number and are mostly social in nature with the exception of those concerning student discipline. In instances regarding student discipline Mrs. Andrew exercises "limited control" with teachers and must "tread softly" as in the case of Mr. Harvey, the physical education teacher.

Mrs. Andrew makes it clear that she does not have jurisdiction over Mr. Harvey, in fact, she carefully prepares her strategy for talking to him and for eliciting his support to resolve the issue of student harassment. Mrs. Andrew said that she had no intention of lecturing Mr. Harvey about his professional responsibility to supervise his class. She will "report the matter to D.J.",the principal," D.J. will handle it." Mrs. Andrew clearly knows the boundary of her authority with Mr. Harvey and other staff and is careful not to cross that line.

In matters regarding parents Mrs. Andrew is limited in authority to those issues involving discipline and placement of special education students. Telephone calls home to parents regarding disciplinary problems of their students are brief, to the point, and direct. A disagreement with a Mrs. Swartz concerning Mrs. Swartz desire to withdraw her son from special programs is met "head on". Mrs. Andrew contacts the Special Education Director and the principal, informs them how she will handle the conference with Mrs. Swartz, requests their support, and threatens to get up and leave the conference if matters are not handled to her satisfaction.

When Mrs. Andrew disagrees with the principal, Mr. Smith, she is given permission by Mr. Smith to confront him directly about his behavior. However, to do so Mrs. Andrew must follow Mr. Smith's guidelines of meeting with him "behind closed doors". Mrs. Andrew remarks that she is most direct with Mr. Smith, especially when he has interfered with her jurisdiction as he did in the matter involving the approval of a fundraiser for Homecoming. Mr. Smith gave permission for a student group to raise funds during Homecoming week even though it had been agreed upon previously that all decisions affecting Homecoming were the jurisdiction of Mrs. Andrew as Student Council advisor. Mrs. Andrew reports that she

confronted the principal in his office regarding her anger at his actions. According to Mrs. Andrew, Mr. Smith was still "doing penance" for his misdeed and treated her with much deference during the ensuing days.

The Role of "Unofficial Go-Between to the Principal"

As an "unofficial go-between to the principal Mrs. Andrew is frequently viewed by staff as a way to "test the waters" prior to meeting with the principal. This "go-between role might also be classified as a "buffer" or "middleman" role. There is absolutely no authority inherent in the role and the Assistant Principal must be very careful to protect the principal's role while at the same time lending sympathy and advice to the staff.

Erving Goffman gives a description of this unofficial role:

> Another discrepant role is one that is often called the go-between or mediator. The go-between learns the secrets of each side and gives each side the true impression that he will keep its secrets; but he tends to give each side the false impression that he is more loyal to it than to the other side....Sometimes, as in the case of the theatrical agent, the go-between may function as a means by which each side is given a slanted version of the other that is calculated to make a closer relationship between them. (p. 93)

The performance styles for the unofficial role of "go-between" include

buffering, mediating, and cueing. Buffering means to "screen tension", "to soften" the blow. Hanson (1985) describes buffering as neither accidental nor haphazard activity. He describes buffering, instead, as a conscious strategy.

Webster provides a definition of a buffer state which is akin to the relationship of the assistant principal in her role between the staff and the principal: "a small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival states." Mrs. Andrew is a "go between" but she is also an administrator and must protect the integrity and dignity of the role of the principal regardless of whether or not she agrees with him. This performance is used when Sally Ames, a counselor new to the high school, comes to see Mrs. Andrew regarding the principal's request for Mrs. Ames to cover another teacher's classroom during the annual Open House. Mrs. Ames resents being asked to cover for another teacher and wants to be free to greet parents in the counseling center.

Although the Assistant Principal agrees with Mrs. Ames she is careful not to say so openly but coaches Mrs. Ames in how to approach the principal regarding her concern. The coaching takes on the characteristics of a full dress rehearsal prior to the performance, "what I want you to do is see D.J. when he gets here tonight. I suggest you talk about coun-

seling services with him and the paramount importance of these services to students and parents....I would say you have a fairly good argument...."

Mrs. Andrew is careful to not openly disagree with the principal. She indicates, however, that she believes it is part of her job role to help staff process their concerns or questions to the principal. One staff member wants time off to travel to China during the school year but is reluctant to approach the principal, feeling that the principal will say "no". Mrs. Andrew says to him, "Well, that's not my decision to make, let me tell you that's a decision that has to come through the principal but I counselled him on how to make it.....I do a lot of counseling with teachers in terms of how to couch their requests to the principal...."

A part of the "go-between" role involves a process of cueing. Webster defines a "cue" as "a hint, an intimation, the part one has to perform as in a play". Goffman also talks about the process of cueing employed among team-mates. Mr. Smith and Mrs. Andrew are considered team-mates - administrative team mates. Mrs. Andrew, in her efforts to protect the principal's role and prevent him from making mistakes with staff, offers cues in her go-between role. Prior to the counselor meeting with Mr. Smith, the Assistant Principal will "cue" J.D. with what she thinks an appropriate response or strategy might be with Mrs. Ames. Perhaps, Mr.

Smith, has more to lose than to gain by forcing Mrs. Ames to supervise another staff member's room during Open House because, after all, Mrs. Ames is not just the counselor, she is also the president of the Teacher's Association.

Cueing as a performance style is very important. Cueing insures that the other player will give a proper performance and will, in essence, not "shoot himself in the foot" by making an unwise decision. Cueing also permits the go-between to speak on behalf of the teacher and mediate the teacher's position with the principal prior to the actual performance.

The Role of 'Acting Principal"

The role of "Acting Principal" is a temporary role, carrying with it temporary authority. On numerous occasions the Assistant Principal is asked to "take over" in the absence of the principal, however, taking over generally refers to two performance styles: direct confrontation and delaying strategies. Direct confrontation occurs when the problematic situation must be resolved immediately for the health and safety of staff and students. For example, on one occasion when the principal was absent a student was hit by a car in the crosswalk only a few blocks from the school. Mrs. Andrew was notified by police, ran to the accident scene, accompanied the student to the hospital and contacted the mother. There

was no delay, no hesitation.

On other occasions, however, decisions which do not generally fall into the authority of the Assistant Principal are deferred or delayed until such time as the principal returns. Mrs. Andrew does not want to overstep the boundary of her authority or create additional problem situations for the principal. "Besides", she adds, "those are his decisions to make - most of the time he's just across the street at the district office, anyway, and I can always call him if I need to before making a decision." The performance, after all, is only a token performance, and the role only temporary, a brief appearance on stage.

The Role of " Administrative Team Member"

When Mrs. Andrew plays the role of Administrative Team Member she performs in concert with the principal. Goffman describes this concept as "a set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine may be referred to as a performance team or, in short, a team." (p. 48) According to Goffman, the concept of team allows us to think of performances that are given by one, or more than one performer.

Goffman also says that there are certain rules to this team performance:

> It would seem that while a team performance is

> in progress, any member of the team has the power to give the show away or disrupt it by inappropriate conduct. Each team member is forced to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him. (p. 50)

The Assistant Principal relates a story of her maintenance of the show or the performance given by the principal to the audience - the teachers at Edison High School: "On one occasion Mr. Smith was talking to the staff at a meeting. I was not in agreement with what he said. If it's a decision totally out of my bailiwick I just gulp and eat it and go on with my job and try to focus on something else so that I don't let it get to me."

Goffman describes the Assistant Principal's performance in this manner:

> Maintaining the line during a performance when the member of a team makes a mistake in the presence of the audience, we often find the other team members must suppress their immediate desire to punish and instruct the offender, until, that is, the audience is no longer present. (p.55)

Goffman also says that there is often a strict rule that one superordinate must not show hostility or disrespect toward any other superordinate while in the presence of a member of the subordinate team. Mrs. Andrew, as Administrative Team member, must not "give away the principal's show" regardless of her personal feelings on an issue.

The Assistant Principal is also informed by the principal that any disagreements she may have with him must be handled "backstage", that is, behind closed doors. "I can say what I want to him behind closed doors in the privacy of his office but when we come out we are a team".

As an Administrative Team member, the Assistant Principal's authority over parents, teachers, and students is ancillary to the principal's. Her performance style in this role is largely that of a supporting player. However, the role of team member allows the principal and his assistant to exercise a unique performance style known as "staging". Staging is a technique practiced "backstage" - away from the audience. Staging involves not only planning what will take place but frequently involves a rehearsal of the performance before going before the audience.

According to Goffman, the backstage is a place where "costumes and other parts of the personal front may be adjusted and scrutinized for flaws. Here the team can run through the performance, checking for offending expressions when no one is present to be affronted by them;.....here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forego speaking his lines, and step out of character." (p.70)

The Administrative Team of Mr. Smith and Mrs. Andrew use the backstage to plan their performance with special education teachers. Mr.

Smith is going to meet with the teachers. He will talk with them about how he wants them to handle a particularly disruptive parent. Mr. Smith steps into Mrs. Andrew's office and closes the door (backstage). He rehearses what he will tell the teachers. Mrs. Smith concurs and offers some advice on the performance by suggesting lines the principal might use.

The role of Administrative Team member allows for interchange, rehearsal, and mutual support. The performers "get their act together " before they must face the audience. Lines are adjusted, the performance is strengthened by the participation of both members.

The Role of "Unofficial Mom"

The Assistant Principal must occasionally play the role of "mom". Mrs. Andrew's two sons attend Edison High School. She recognizes this poses some unique problematic situations for her from time to time. The only possible authority the Assistant Principal has in this role is over one's own children. Mrs. Andrew has learned "not to interfere" in business affecting her children. She may manipulate one son's schedule backstage so the son is not in a particular teacher's class, however, there is no official way for her to do this in her capacity as Assistant Principal.

Because the role of mom carries no authority in school matters the

Assistant Principal selects performance styles which will protect her sons and limit direct confrontation with teachers who do have authority over her children.

Performance styles for the unofficial role of "mom" are generally limited to avoidance, referral, or diversion managment techniques. When problematic situations arise regarding her sons Mrs. Andrew sometimes ignores or avoids dealing with the situation. Sometimes she diverts the problematic situation by raising other issues, however, another performance style is simply to refer the matter to the principal.

Mrs. Andrew tells of an encounter with two students sent to her by the orchestra teacher. The students were directed by the teacher to ask the Assistant Principal to talk with the Band teacher so the students could be allowed to use a practice area in the band room. Mrs. Andrew does not respect the orchestra teacher, is angry with her for sending students to do her "dirty work" and is concerned that her son, an orchestra student, might suffer consequences as a result of any disagreement between the Assistant Principal and the orchestra teacher. Mrs. Andrew decides to refer the matter to Mr. Smith for resolution and says, "It's just not worth it. My children are too important to risk in this situation and besides, Mr. Smith is in charge of rooms anyway - she knows that."

Mrs. Andrew has avoided possible conflict and has referred the matter. She has protected her children and secured her position as she knew she had no authority to act in the matter. By avoidance and referral her children were protected and the performance was carried out by the principal.

Consequences of Performance Styles

What are the consequences of the Assistant Principal's performance styles on the culture of the high school? The ultimate goal of all performances is to stabilize the school culture from problematic situations inside and outside the school community. As a result of most performances the problem is solved and life goes on.

A second consequence of performance styles is predictability. Teachers, parents, and students can forecast most performances based on the range of authority of each performer. In the Assistant Principal's case students know that a decision can be made, teachers know they must appeal to the principal, and parents are guided by specific job parameters of the Assistant Principal in matters of discipline and special education student placement. Most performance styles are clearly delineated for the Assistant Principal based on her role at the time the problematic situation arises.

This predictability allows for a third consequence of performance

style - efficiency. If the Assistant Principal knows her role and the limitations of her authority, it takes very little time to select a performance style which is consistent with the limits of her role responsibility. This efficiency of performance style selection allows the Assistant Principal to process a number of problematic situations in very rapid fashion during the course of the school day and allows her to change performance styles quickly. Work is accomplished in a short period of time, further complications are avoided by remaining within the role and peformance styles dictated by that role.

Summary of Conclusions

From the study of performance styles of the Assistant High School Principal it could be hypothesized that, while not mutually exclusive to the roles of the Assistant Principal, these performance styles are most commonly used given a limited range of authority. The ultimate goal of all performances is to maintain the stability of the school. Whether expressed or not, the Assistant Principal recognized the need to maintain the equilibrium of the school culture and followed her own scripts to a very credible and predictable performance.

Performance styles are largely governed by role authority or "locus of control". Most administrators prefer to remain "in role" for the per-

formance. Remaining "in role" is safe and predictable. Safe, because legitimate authority is granted by virture of job description and the principal's delegation. Predictable because performance styles create less confusion for audience and performer. Predictability also means consistency of performance and consistency of performance leads to security and stability for both the Assistant Principal and her audience.

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